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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997

Unforeseen and extraordinary expenses

Fifteenth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses (A/C.5/50/30). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

2. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, the General Assembly resolution on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses is intended to enable the Secretary-General to incur expenditures of an urgent nature, under certain conditions, without reverting to the Assembly on the matter. The historical background for this procedure has been detailed in annex I to the Secretary-General's report.

3. The current procedures for meeting expenses to implement unforeseen activities are summarized in paragraphs 3 to 10 of the Secretary-General's report. Activities for which the Secretary-General has been authorized to enter into commitments are as follows:

(a) Upon certification by him that the activities to be undertaken at his own initiative relate to peace and security;

(b) For implementation of the decisions of the Security Council for activities related to peace and security other than peace-keeping;

(c) For implementation of immediate requirements of the start-up activities for a peace-keeping operation established by the Security Council;

(d) Unforeseen activities not related to peace and security;

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(e) Unforeseen activities approved by the General Assembly.

4. The Secretary-General's own authority, up to a total of $5 million per year, can currently be utilized for items (a), (b), and (c) above.

5. For reasons outlined in paragraphs 11 to 20 of the report, the Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly decide that the resolution on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses should in future reflect the following:

(a) The commitments in any one year of the biennium that the Secretary-General certifies relate to the maintenance of peace and security, under paragraph 1 (a) of the resolution, will be increased to $7 million;

(b) The Secretary-General will be authorized, without the prior concurrence of the Advisory Committee, to enter into commitments not exceeding $3 million in any one year for the immediate requirements of the start-up phase of peace-keeping operations in order to implement decisions of the Security Council.

6. Notwithstanding the reasons put forward by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 11 to 20 of his report, the Advisory Committee believes that there is not sufficient justification for changing the current procedures. For one thing, total expenditures for peace-keeping operations, which have been rising in recent years, appear to have peaked in 1994-1995 at a level of $3.2 billion in 1994 and approximately $2.9 billion in 1995; the current level is forecast at $1.5 billion for 1996. The Advisory Committee also points out that the resolution on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses has been applied in the past to a number of activities that were not unforeseen and that indeed were of an ongoing nature. For example, in its report on special representatives, envoys and related positions (A/50/7/Add.2), the Advisory Committee had pointed out that the resolution was not intended to cover the establishment of positions on a continuing basis.

7. The Advisory Committee believes that proper planning is also essential with regard to the management of authority possessed by the Secretary-General. In this connection, the Advisory Committee points out that it is in session for most of the year and available throughout the year. For this reason, as well as for those given in paragraph 6 above, the Advisory Committee believes that the level of commitment authority should remain at $5 million. However, the Advisory Committee recommends that, with regard to the amounts to be authorized under paragraph 1 (a) of the resolution on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses, for the immediate requirements of the start-up phase of peace-keeping operations, these amounts "would revert to the relevant peace-keeping budgets when the commitment authority is granted by the Advisory Committee or when approval is given by the General Assembly" (A/C.5/50/30, para. 22) thus replenishing the level of the commitment authority available to the Secretary-General. On a related matter, the Secretary-General, in consultation with the International Court of Justice may wish to review the terms of paragraph 1 (b) of the resolution, in the light of current budgetary practice with regard to the Court.